

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7338

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 PANAMA 03914

FOR: ARA/PAN BROWN

E.O. 11652: N/A

SUBJECT: SITE DESCRIPTIONS FOR PRESIDENTIAL VISIT

REF: BROWN/DACHI TELCON 6/1/78

1. FOLLOWING ARE DESCRIPTIONS OF SITES PRESIDENT
CARTER IS MOST LIKELY TO VISIT DURING HIS STAY IN
PANAMA:

2. TOCUMEN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT: THE CURRENT
TERMINAL BUILDING AND RUNWAYS AT TOCUMEN
INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT WERE INAUGURATED IN 1948
BY THEN PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT ENRIQUE JIMENEZ.
THE AIRPORT WAS CONSTRUCTED BY PANAMA WITH TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE FROM THE U.S. CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD.
UP UNTIL THAT TIME TRAVELERS ARRIVING IN PANAMA BY
AIR WERE OBLIGED TO LAND AT ALBROOK FIELD IN THE
CANAL ZONE.

3. TOCUMEN'S SINGLE RUNWAY IS 8,000 FEET LONG AND
530 FEET WIDE, BUILT TO SUPPORT AIRCRAFT WEIGHING
UP TO 100 TONS. TWO U.S. AIRLINES, PAN AMERICAN
AND BRANIFF, AND 19 OTHER AIRLINES OPERATE FLIGHTS
IN AND OUT OF TOCUMEN, WHICH IS A MAJOR WAYSTATION
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FOR FLIGHTS TO AND FROM SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA.

4. TOCUMEN'S NEW INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL, LOCATED
NEAR THE CURRENT FIELD, IS SCHEDULED TO OPEN IN
JULY, 1978, AND HAS MODERN FACILITIES AND AN
11,375-FOOT RUNWAY.

5. NUEVO PANAMA COLISEUM: THE NUEVO PANAMA COLISEUM, SITE OF THE CEREMONY IN WHICH PRESIDENT CARTER AND GENERAL TORRIJOS WILL EXCHANGE THE INSTRUMENTS OF RATIFICATION OF THE PANAMA CANAL TREATIES, WAS INAUGURATED FEB. 6, 1970. IT WAS CONSTRUCTED FOR USE IN THE ELEVENTH CENTRAL AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GAMES.

6. THE BUILDING, WHOSE CIRCULAR DESIGN WAS CONCEIVED BY ARCHITECT GUSTAVO DIAZ, COST ALMOST DOLLARS 2.5 MILLION. IT HOLDS 9,000 PERSONS NORMALLY, BUT THE CAPACITY WILL BE CONSIDERABLY LESS FOR THE EXCHANGE CEREMONY BECAUSE OF SECURITY AND SPECIAL CONSTRUCTION.

7. THE NUEVO PANAMA COLISEUM ORIGINALLY WAS BUILT FOR SPORTING EVENTS AND MANY SUCH ACTIVITIES HAVE TAKEN PLACE THERE, BUT IT IS ALSO FREQUENTLY USED FOR CULTURAL AND MASS RELIGIOUS EVENTS. THE BALLET OF SENEGAL, HOLIDAY ON ICE AND OTHERS HAVE APPEARED THERE.

8. FIFTH OF MAY PLAZA: ON MAY 5, 1914, THREE MONTHS BEFORE THE PANAMA CANAL OPENED, A GRASS FIRE NEAR THE GOVERNMENT MUNITIONS STORAGE AREA REACHED A SMALL BUILDING WHERE THE GUNPOWDER SUPPLY WAS STORED AND SET IT ON FIRE. THE RESULTING EXPLOSION KILLED FIVE FIREMEN FIGHTING THE FLAMES.
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9. NATIONAL MOURNING WAS DECLARED, AND A COLLECTION TAKEN TO ESTABLISH A PUBLIC PARK ON THE SITE, AS A TRIBUTE TO THE FIREMEN'S COURAGE. THE FIFTH OF MAY PLAZA, CONSTRUCTED ENTIRELY WITH DONATED FUNDS, WAS INAUGURATED MAY 5, 1916, AND DEDICATED TO "THE GLORY, TRADITION AND SACRIFICE OF THE PANAMANIAN FIREMEN'S CORPS."

10. SINCE THAT TIME THE PLAZA HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN A GATHERING POINT FOR MASS RALLIES. ONE OF THE LARGEST OF SUCH RALLIES TOOK PLACE SEPT. 9, 1977, WHEN OVER 200,000 PERSONS GATHERED TO WELCOME GEN. OMAR TORRIJOS HOME AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE PANAMAN CANAL TREATIES IN WASHINGTON. ON MAY 16 THE PLAZA WILL BE THE SITE OF AN APPEARANCE BY PRESIDENT CARTER AND GEN. TORRIJOS AFTER THE EXCHANGE OF INSTRUMENTS OF RATIFICATION OF THE TREATIES.

11. EL PANAMA HOTEL: THE EL PANAMA HOTEL, WHERE PRESIDENT AND MRS. CARTER, THE OFFICIAL U.S. PARTY,

AND THE OFFICIAL PARTIES OF THE VISITING HEAD OF STATE WILL BE STAYING, WAS BUILT IN 1951, ONE OF THE MOST LUXURIOUS HOTELS IN SOUTH AMERICA AT THAT TIME.

12. THE HOTEL WAS DESIGNED BY U.S. ARCHITECT EDWARD DURELL STONE, AND IS LOCATED ON A TRACT OF 16 ACRES IN THE CENTER OF TOWN, NEAR THE UNIVERSITY OF PANAMA AND THE BAROQUE-STYLE CHURCH OF THE VIRGIN OF CARMEN. THE ARCHITECT WISHED TO EMPHASIZE THE AREA'S GREENERY, AND SO DESIGNED THE HOTEL WITHIN A TROPICAL GARDEN, IN WHICH SOME 80 KINDS OF PLANTS CAN BE FOUND.

13. THE HOTEL WAS RUN BY KERKEBY, A U.S. CORPORATION, UNCLASSIFIED

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UNTIL 1957, WHEN IT BECAME THE PANAMA HILTON FOR TEN YEARS. IT REMAINED IN PRIVATE HANDS UNTIL 1977, WHEN THE NATIONAL BANK OF PANAMA TOOK OVER ITS FALTERING FINANCES.

14. AMONG THE DIGNITARIES WHO HAVE STAYED AT THE EL PANAMA ARE ARCHBISHOP MAKARIOS OF CYPRUS, KING JUAN CARLOS OF SPAIN, AND THE ASTRONAUTS OF APOLLO 12.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7339

UNCLAS SECTION 2 OF 2 PANAMA 03914

FOR: ARA/PAN BROWN

15. PRESIDENTIAL PALACE: THE PANAMANIAN PRESIDENTIAL

PALACE, WHERE A STATE DINNER IN HONOR OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S VISIT WILL BE HELD, IS ONE OF THE OLDEST BUILDINGS IN PANAMA. IT WAS CONSTRUCTED IN THE EARLY 1670S BY DON LUIS DE LOZADA QUINONES, ONE OF THE TWO RULING JUDGES OF THE SPANISH ROYAL COURT WHO GOVERNED THE COLONY OF PANAMA AT THAT TIME. LOZADA QUINONES CONFISCATED ALL THE MATERIALS AND FUNDS SENT FROM SPAIN AND PERU FOR THE ENTIRE COLONY AS HIS PERSONAL FUNDS, AND WITH THEM HE BUILT THE LARGEST MANSION IN THE CITY, AFTER OUSTING POOR SETTLERS FROM THE LAND.

16. UPON LOZADA QUINONES' DEATH, AND AS A RESULT OF COMPLAINTS FROM THE CITY COUNCIL, THE KING OF SPAIN TOOK OVER THE HOUSE AND CONVERTED IT INTO THE PACIFIC CUSTOMS HOUSE. AS SUCH IT SERVED AS A STOREHOUSE FOR THE TREASURES FROM PERU AND GOODS FROM SPAIN. AFTER PANAMA'S INDEPENDENCE FROM SPAIN, AS PART OF COLOMBIA, IN 1821, THE BUILDING WAS USED AS A STOREHOUSE AND LATER A NORMAL SCHOOL WHERE MANY OF PANAMA'S LEADERS STUDIED. IN 1855, IT WAS DESIGNATED THE PRESIDENTIAL HOUSE.

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17. THE ENTIRE BUILDING WAS RENOVATED IN 1922, UNDER PRESIDENT BELISARIO PORRAS. A FRIEND OF PORRAS' PRESENTED HIM WITH TWO WHITE HERONS FROM THE PROVINCE OF DARIEN, WHICH HE KEPT IN THE PATIO. SINCE THEN, THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HERONS AT THE PALACE, AND THE BUILDING HAS BEEN KNOWN AS THE PALACE OF THE HERONS. PANAMANIAN ARTIST ROBERTO LEWIS WAS COMMISSIONED TO DO HISTORICAL MURALS IN THE RECEPTION AND DINING HALLS. THE DINING HALL IS ALSO KNOWN AS THE HALL OF THE TAMARINDS, SINCE MOST OF THE MURALS DEPICT THE TAMARIND FRUIT TREES ON THE ISLAND OF TABOGA.

18. THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE IS THE OFFICIAL RESIDENCE AND OFFICES OF PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT DEMETRIO LAKAS.

19. MIRAFLORES LOCKS: MIRAFLORES LOCKS, THE FIRST SET OF LOCKS ON THE PACIFIC ENTRANCE OF THE PANAMA CANAL, RAISE OR LOWER SHIPS IN TWO STEPS TO AND FROM MIRAFLORES LAKE, WHICH LIES BETWEEN MIRAFLORES AND PEDRO MIGUEL LOCKS. THE GATES OF THE LOCKS, ORIGINAL EQUIPMENT, AS ON ALL THE LOCKS, ARE THE HIGHEST IN THE SYSTEM, BECAUSE OF THE EXTREME TIDAL VARIATION IN THE PACIFIC.

20. THE LOCKS WERE COMPLETED IN SEPTEMBER, 1913, BUT BECAUSE OF SLIDES IN THE CULEBRA CUT, THE FIRST SHIP DID NOT TRANSIT UNTIL MAY, 1914. THE LOCKS WERE BUILT ON THE SITE OF THE FRENCH CANAL TOWN OF MIRAFLORES, WHICH WAS NAMED AFTER THE MARQUIS OF MIRAFLORES, A 19TH CENTURY SPANISH HISTORIAN.

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21. THE MIRAFLORES BRIDGE, WHICH SPANS THE CANAL JUST SOUTH OF THE LOCKS, IS NOT PRESENTLY IN USE. IT WAS BUILT IN 1942 TO HANDLE THE INCREASE IN TRAFFIC BETWEEN THE EAST AND WEST BANKS OF THE CANAL, BEFORE THE THATCHER FERRY BRIDGE (ALSO KNOWN AS THE BRIDGE OF THE AMERICAS) AT THE PACIFIC MOUTH OF THE CANAL WAS OPENED IN 1962. JORDEN

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